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Sailors Receive Hawaii Medal of Honor

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HONOLULU (NNS) -- Thirty-one fallen service members posthumously received the Hawaii State Medal of Honor (HMOH) from the Hawaii State Senate and House of Representatives during a ceremony March 25, at the Hawaii State Capitol.

The HMOH was awarded on behalf of the State of Hawaii to family and friends of service members who were killed in action while serving as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2007.

"Today we honor the service and sacrifice of your loved ones. Our nation continues to strengthen thanks to remarkable individuals like these 31 who were willing to sacrifice for the rest of us," said Hawaii State Gov. Linda Lingle. "Like all of America's fallen heroes, these 31 are not truly gone. They were defending democracy and our way of life and there is nothing anyone can do nobler than that."

Thirteen of the service members were represented by friends and families during the event, each receiving a plaque and certificate. All personnel were rendered with honors of two bells after their name was announced.

Three Navy Sailors were recognized during the ceremony including Lt. Cmdr. Morgan Tulang, Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Victor Jeffries and Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Mark Cannon.

Jeffries was the most recent of the three Navy Sailors to be honored. Jeffries died on Dec. 31, 2007 as a result of injuries suffered in a vehicle accident while assigned to Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group, Kuwait. Receiving the HMOH on his behalf was his wife, Elizabeth Aguirre-Jeffries.

"It was very emotional, but I'm grateful for the state of Hawaii and the military for this State Medal of Honor," said Jeffries. "We are very proud of Victor and this represents what [he] did for his family, the people of Hawaii, and the country and we greatly appreciate it."

A Hawaii native, Tulang died from apparent natural causes March 2, 2007, while assigned to U.S. Central Command Deployment Distribution Operations Center, Kuwait City. On hand to accept the HMOH on his behalf were his parents, Michael and Juliet Tulang.

"We feel really honored. This award brings back a lot of memories. Today is a great day and I'm thankful for the state of Hawaii to honor him," said Michael Tulang.

Cannon's family was not in attendance but will receive the HMOH at a later time. Cannon died Oct. 2, 2007, while conducting combat operations in Kunar Province, Afghanistan while assigned to 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, based out of Marine Corps Base Hawaii.

After the presentation of the awards, members of the Hickam Air Force Base Honor Guard performed a 21-gun salute followed by the playing of taps by the U.S. Pacific Fleet Band.

Following the ceremony, Rear Adm. T.G. Alexander, commander of Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, commented on the importance of holding the ceremony to honor the fallen service members.

"I think this meant a great deal to the families. It sends a very powerful message to them about how important their loved ones are to the state of Hawaii and how important the state sees their sacrifices," said Alexander. "It's important for all of us to stop and recognize the sacrifices people make for our country and that the families know how much we appreciate those sacrifices."

Recipients of the HMOH include members of the U.S. Armed Forces and the Hawaii National Guard who were residents of the State of Hawaii, attended an educational institution in Hawaii, or who were stationed in Hawaii by order of the Department of Defense. As of January 31, 217 service members with Hawaii ties have sacrificed their lives while in the line of duty serving as part of OIF and OEF.

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